

life, it had a good chance of being funny on the page. When I made the drawings, those joyful nights with the Loafman boys returned unbidden and clear—the brightening I spoke of—a confluence of

imagination and memory. When I look back over the past few months, that's what the Caldecott has felt like. Receiving this honor has been another kind of brightening, also unexpected, that has

cleared away the chaff and chatter of doubt and uncertainty, making me more sure of my choices, reminding me of the good and true reasons I make books for children. Thank you. ☺

A Good Picture Writer

Eric Carle

2003 Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal Winner

I have to confess that I had never given much thought as to how the American Library Association awards are chosen. So when Ginny Moore Kruse phoned me and began to inform me of the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award, I thanked her and attempted some small talk, interrupting her carefully scripted announcement. Then she, in turn, interrupted me to continue what she had to say.

In the meantime, I have learned that the committee secretly, painstakingly, and in long sessions into the middle of the night, arrives at their decision about whom to honor and then calls the recipient. Therefore I wish to apologize for my rudeness and to thank you for honoring me and my work with the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award.

Even in my earliest childhood, long before I knew the words artist and art, I enjoyed making pictures. My first-grade teacher, Miss Frickey in Syracuse, New York, where I was born, was the first of many people I have to thank for believing in me as an artist. She made an appointment to see my mother to make sure she was aware of her son's talent, making a strong point that my mother and father should nurture that gift. And they always did.

However, I never finished out the happy year in Miss Frickey's class as about halfway through it my parents, German immigrants, decided we should return to

Germany. There I would spend the next seventeen years before returning to the United States, the land of my birth. I still have unpleasant memories of both my art class and my regular classes in grammar school in my new country. I also remember with a shiver something new of which I had previously no inkling: corporal punishment.

ber him as a shining example of what an educator can be.

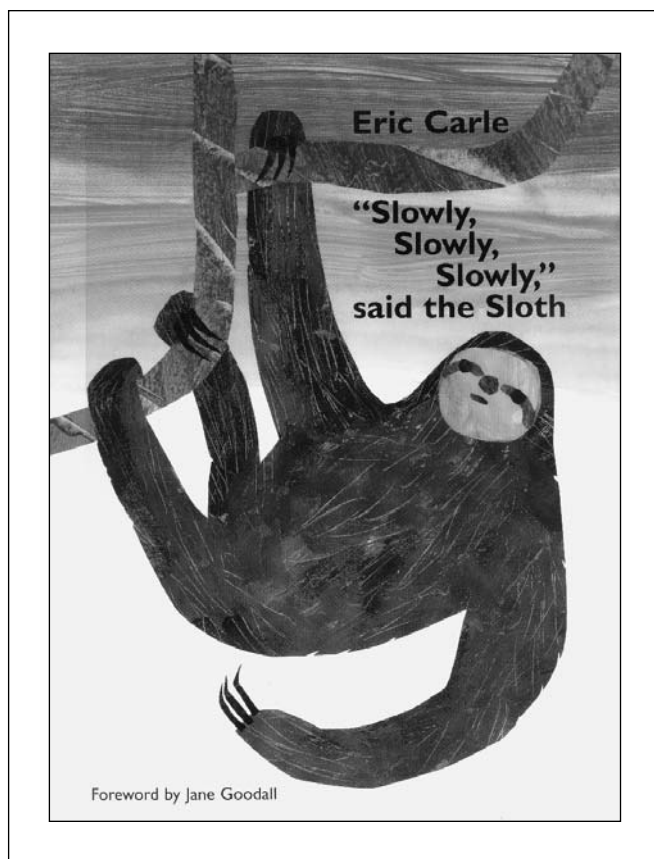
When I was fifteen, the war ended. Much of Stuttgart, where I lived, was reduced to rubble. But life somehow went on and schools reopened. There I began to study graphic arts under Ernst Schneider, my professor and mentor whom I admired so much then and still admire to this day. After my graduation, I went on to practice the art of the poster, an influence that is still evident in my present-day work.

Then, just before my twenty-third birthday, I returned to New York, where I began to work as a graphic designer and art director, mainly in advertising.

When I was in my mid-thirties, the poet and educator Bill Martin Jr. saw some of my work in an advertisement and commissioned me to illustrate his text for a children's book, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* It was an assignment that set me on fire and changed my life.

But what about books and literature and librarians and reading?

Isn't this what ALA is all about? In my childhood home, there were no sagging bookshelves. I don't remember being read to, unless having the funny papers read to me by my father on Sunday mornings counts as such. I did have two fat comic books—one Mickey Mouse, one Flash Gordon. Ah, Flash Gordon. How I loved his space adventures, which often involved beautiful women.



"Slowly, Slowly, Slowly," said the Sloth by Eric Carle

In high school, my art teacher, Herr Krauss, who also believed in my talent, secretly introduced me, an unsophisticated boy of about twelve, to the beauty of abstract, modern, and expressionistic art. This was actually a very risky thing to do during the Nazi years, as Hitler had declared these kinds of art to be degenerate. It was *verboten* (forbidden) to be practiced by artists and forbidden to be shown. Herr Krauss was a dedicated and courageous teacher. I will always remem-

Yes, I remember books over time, but I was not a driven reader. I don't remember really being under the spell of the written word until right after the end of the war and before my studies at the Stuttgart Academy of Applied Arts had begun, when there was an interval of a few months. One day, lucky for me, I decided to visit the library. The library, too, had been heavily damaged: The windows were boarded up, water stains ran down the cracked walls. It was cold inside the library; heating oil and coal were in short supply. Behind the desk sat a librarian with a scarf around her shoulders for warmth. She was slight and friendly. She recommended books, many of them formerly forbidden titles, copies of which had been burnt during the Nazi regime, just as modern, abstract, and expressionistic art had been forbidden and, in some cases, destroyed.

My new friend, the librarian, felt I would enjoy the works of Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, Andre Gide, and others. My librarian was right. The words of these authors often penetrated my heart if not always my intellect.

But soon I was drawn back to the world of color, line, and shapes. And again the book became a somewhat lesser friend. I admit this to you with a bit of embarrassment.

It is said one cannot write well unless one has read a lot. Well, I didn't have many books, but I did have a large and colorful family full of gifted storytellers.

There was my Uncle Adam, who had flown with von Richthofen, the Red Baron, in World War I. With a jug of apple-jack near his elbow, Uncle Adam loved to tell me stories. When I knew him, he was a brick mason, a plasterer. The book *My Apron* is based on my admiring relationship with him.

There was my Uncle August, the Sunday painter and storyteller. "Wind up my thinking machine," he would say to me

when I was a little boy, pointing to an imaginary crank on his temple. And when I obliged him by pretending to wind the crank, wonderful stories poured out. His best story, too lengthy to repeat, tells how he, already a Catholic, was converted to Catholicism. Unforgettable, but unquotable, is his story about his job in a sauerkraut factory in Hoboken. Hoboken? Yes, Hoboken!

There was my maternal grandmother, who told me the story of how the pretzel was invented, which inspired *Walter the Baker*. In fact, I did have an Uncle Walter who was a baker and also a storyteller.



Walter the Baker by Eric Carle

There was my paternal grandmother, who told me many times the story of her father who had left his wife and family when my grandmother was a small child. She told me that he was handsome and rich and owned a beer brewery in Denver, Colorado, and that he drowned in a beer barrel and that she had received in the mail from Denver a bag filled with gold nuggets. Several years ago, I was invited by the Friends of the Denver Library to give a talk there, where I found out that,

as with most good stories, parts of her story were true and parts were invented. It was a touching moment to visit my great-grandfather's grave in Denver.

And then there was my father, who drew pictures for me when I was a little boy and took me by the hand for long walks across meadows and through forests, explaining insect and animal behavior. But when I was ten years old, World War II broke out and my father soon became one of the many faceless soldiers who vanished in the inferno that swept across Europe. Then, eight long years later, when I was eighteen, he returned from a prisoner of war camp inside the Soviet Union, weighing a mere eighty pounds.

So there have been stories in my life. There was my family. They were wonderful teachers. There was the kind librarian. There was and is Ann Beneduce, my editor and friend who has guided me from my first book. There is my wife Bobbie, who has put up with my many creative moods for thirty years and supported me when I most needed that support.

And now, well, it seems things have fallen into place—both my art and my stories—and it has all worked out happily in the end.

Not so long ago, a child told me, "You are a good picture writer." I think that is a very good description of what I do. I like being a picture writer. Someone else has said that my books are "literature for the not-yet and just-about-to-be reader." I like that description, too. Literature! Maybe I deserve the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award after all.

I thank you for honoring me. And I thank all the people in my life who have made it possible. The award is also a birthday gift. In a couple of days I will celebrate my seventy-fourth birthday. But most of all, I am grateful that the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award has not been awarded to me posthumously. Thank you. ☺